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## SEX IN PRIMITIVE MORALITY.

THE function of morality is to regulate the activities of associated life so that all may have what we call fair play. It is impossible to think of morality aside from expressions of force, primarily physical force. "Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not remove the ancient landmark;" and all approvals and disapprovals imply that the act in question has affected or will affect the interests of others, or of society at large, for better or for worse. And since morality goes back so directly to forms of activity and their regulation, we may expect to find that the motor male and the more stationary female have had a different relation to the development of a moral code.

As between nutrition and reproduction, in the struggle for life, nutrition plays a larger rôle—in volume, at any rate—in the life history of the individual. A consideration of the causes of the modification of species in nature shows that the changes in morphology and habit of the animal which relate to food-getting are more fundamental and numerous than those which relate to wooing. In a moral code, likewise, whether in an animal or human society, the bulk of morality turns upon food rather than sex relations; and since the male is more active in both these relations, and since, further, morality is the mode of regulating activities in these relations, it is to be expected that morality, and immorality as well, will be found primarily to a greater degree functions of the motor male disposition.

Tribal safety and the preservation and extension of the territory furnishing food demand the organized attention of the group first of all; and the emotional demonstrations and social rewards following modes of behavior which have a protective or provident meaning for the group, and the public disapproval and disallowance of modes of behavior which impair the safety or force capacity, and consequent satisfactions of the group, become in the tribe the most powerful of all stimuli, and stimuli to which

the male is peculiarly able to react. This is not like the case of hunger and other physiological stimuli which are conditioned from within, but if the individual acts for the advantage of the group rather than for his personal advantage, the stimulus to this action must be furnished socially. Group preservation being of first-rate importance, no group would survive in which the public showed apathy on this point. Lewis and Clarke say of the Dakota Indians: "What struck us most was an institution peculiar to them and to the Kite Indians, further to the westward, from whom it is said to have been copied. It is an association of the most active and brave young men, who are bound to each other by attachment, secured by a vow never to retreat before any danger, or to give way to their enemies. In war they go forward without sheltering themselves behind trees, or aiding their natural valor by any artifice. . . . These young men sit, and encamp, and dance together, distinct from the rest of the nation; they are generally about thirty or thirty-five years old; and such is the deference paid to courage that their seats in the council are superior to those of the chiefs, and their persons more respected."<sup>1</sup> The consciousness of the value of male activity is here expressed in an exaggerated degree—in a degree bordering upon the pathological, since the reckless exposure of life to danger is not necessary to success at a given moment, and is unjustifiable from the standpoint of public safety, unless it be on the side of the suggestive effect of intrepid conduct in creating a general standard of intrepidity. Similarly, the Indians in general often failed to get the full benefit of a victory, because of their practice that the scalp of an enemy belonged to him who took it, and their pursuits after a rout were checked by the delay of each to scalp his own.

The pedagogical attempts of primitive society, so far as they are applied to boys, have as an end the encouragement of morality of a motor, not a sentimental, type. The boys are taught war and the chase, and to despise the occupations of women. Thompson says of the Zulu boys: "It is a melancholy fact that

<sup>1</sup> LEWIS AND CLARKE, *Travels to the Source of the Missouri*, ed. 1814, Vol. I, p. 60.

when they have arrived at a very early age, should their mothers attempt to chastise them, such is the law that these lads are at the moment allowed to kill their mothers.”<sup>1</sup> Ethnologists often make mention of the fact that the natural races do not generally punish children, and while this is due in part to a less definite sense of responsibility, as well as of less nervousness in parents, non-interference is a part of their system of training: “Instead of teaching the boy civil manners, the father desires him to beat and pelt the strangers who come to the tent; to steal or secret in joke some trifling article belonging to them; and the more saucy and impudent they are, the more troublesome to strangers and all the men of the encampment, the more they are praised as giving indication of a future enterprising and warlike disposition.”<sup>2</sup> Theft is also encouraged among boys as a developer of their wits. The Spartan boy and the fox is a classical example; and Diodorus relates that in Egypt the boy who wished to become a thief was required to enroll his name with the captain of the thieves, and to turn over to him all stolen articles. The citizens who were robbed went to the captain of thieves and recovered their property upon payment of one-fourth of its value.<sup>3</sup> Admiration of a lawless deed often foreruns censure of the deed in consciousness today: there are few men who do not admire a particularly daring and successful bank or diamond robbery, though they deprecate the social injury done.

Formally becoming a man is made so much of in early society, because it is on this occasion that fitness for activity is put to the test. Initiatory ceremonies fall at the time of puberty in the candidate, and consist of instruction and trials of fortitude. A certain show of the proceeds of activity is also exacted of young men, especially in connection with marriage, and the youth is not permitted to marry until he has killed certain animals or acquired certain trophies. The attention given to manly practices in connection with marriage is seen in this example

<sup>1</sup>G. THOMPSON, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa*, Appendix, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup>J. L. BURCKHARDT, *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys*, Vol. I, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup>POST, *Bausteine einer allgemeinen Rechtswissenschaft*, Vol. I, p. 287.

from the Kukis: "When a young man has fixed his affections upon a young woman, either of his own or of some neighboring *Parah*, his father visits her father and demands her in marriage for his son: her father, on this, inquires what are the merits of the young man to entitle him to her favor; and how many can he afford to entertain at the wedding feast; to which the father of the young man replies that his son is a brave warrior, a good hunter, and an expert thief; for that he can produce so many heads of the enemies he has slain and of the game he has killed; that in his house are such and such stolen goods; and that he can feast so many (mentioning the number) at his marriage."<sup>1</sup> Occasionally the ability to take punishment is even made a part of the marriage ceremony. At Arab marriages "there is much feasting, and the unfortunate bridegroom undergoes the ordeal of whipping by the relations of his bride, in order to test his courage. Sometimes this punishment is exceedingly severe, being inflicted with the coorbach, or whip of hippopotamus hide, which is cracked vigorously about his ribs and back. If the happy husband wishes to be considered a man worth having, he must receive the chastisement with an expression of enjoyment; in which case the crowds of women in admiration again raise their thrilling cry."<sup>2</sup>

A very simple record of successful activity is the bones of animals. McCosh says of the Mishmis of India: "Nor are these hospitable rites allowed to be forgotten; the skull of every animal that has graced the board is hung up as a record in the hall of the entertainer; he who has the best-stocked Golgotha is looked upon as the man of the greatest wealth and liberality, and when he dies the whole smoke-dried collection of many years is piled upon his grave as a monument of his riches and a memorial of his worth."<sup>3</sup> And Grange of the Nagas: "In front of the houses of the greater folks are strung up the bones of the animals with which they have feasted the villagers, whether

<sup>1</sup> MACRAE, "Account of the Kookies or Lunctas," *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. VII, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> S. W. BAKER, *The Nile Tributaries of Abyssinia*, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. V, p. 195.

tigers, elephants, cows, hogs, dogs, or monkeys, or aught else, for it signifies little what comes to their net."<sup>1</sup>

The head-hunting mania of Borneo is also a pathological expression of the desire to get approval of destructive activity from both the living and the dead: "The aged of the people were no longer safe among their kindred, and corpses were secretly disinterred to increase the grizzly store. Superstition soon added its ready impulse to the general movement. The aged warrior could not rest in his grave till his relatives had taken a head in his name; the maiden disdained the weak-hearted suitor whose hand was not yet stained with some cowardly murder."<sup>2</sup>

Class distinctions and the attendant ceremonial observances go immediately back to an appreciation of successful motor activities. It needs only to observe the conduct of weaker animals in the presence of the stronger to appreciate the differences in behavior induced by the presence of superior motor ability. The recognition of this difference, as it is finally expressed in habitual forms of behavior, becomes the sign of the difference, while the difference goes back, in reality, to a difference in capacity. This example from Raffles illustrates the intensity of moral meaning which the appreciation of achievement may take on in the end: "At the court of *Sura-kérta* I recollect that once, when holding a private conference with the *Súsunan* at the residency, it became necessary for the *Rádan adipáti* to be dispatched to the palace for the royal seal: the poor old man was, as usual, squatting, and as the *Susunan* happened to be seated with his face toward the door, it was fully ten minutes before his minister, after repeated ineffectual attempts, could obtain the opportunity of rising sufficiently to reach the latch without being seen by his royal master. The mission on which he was dispatched was urgent, and the *Susunan* himself inconvenienced by the delay; but these inconveniences were insignificant compared with the indecorum of being seen out of the *dódok* posture. When it is necessary for an inferior to move, he must still retain

<sup>1</sup> Journal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. VIII, p. 470.

<sup>2</sup> F. BOYLE, *Adventures among the Dyaks of Borneo*, p. 170.

that position, and walk with his hams upon his heels until he is out of his superior's sight."<sup>1</sup> Drury says that a Malagasy chief, on his return from war, "had scarcely seated himself at his door, when his wife came out crawling on her hands and knees until she came to him, and then licked his feet; when she had done, his mother did the same, and all the women in the town saluted their husbands in the same manner."<sup>2</sup>

An examination of the causes of the approval of conduct in early times thus discloses that approvals were based to a large degree on violent and socially advantageous conduct, that the training and rewards of early society were calculated to develop the skill and fortitude essential to such conduct, and that the men were particularly the representatives of conduct of this type. In the past, at any rate, there has been no glory like military glory, and no adulation like military adulation, and in the vulgar estimation still no quality in the individual ranks with the fighting quality.<sup>3</sup>

But checks upon conduct are even more definitely expressed, and more definitely expressible, than approvals of conduct. Approval is expressed in a more general expansive feeling toward the deserving individual, and this may be accompanied with medals for bravery, promotions, and other rewards, but in general the moral side of life gets no such definite notice as the immoral side. Practices which are disliked by all may be forbidden, while there is no equally summary way of dealing with practices approved by all. In consequence, practices which interfere with the activities of others are inhibited, and to the violation of the inhibition is attached a penalty, resulting in a body of law and a system of punishment. An analysis of the following crimes and punishments among the Kaffirs, for instance, indicates that a definite relation between offensive forms of activity and punishments is present at a comparatively

<sup>1</sup> T. S. RAFFLES, *History of Java*, Vol. I, p. 309,

<sup>2</sup> R. DRURY, *Madagascar*, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> No notice is here taken of the moral content of forms of worship, since forms of worship are to be regarded as reflections of social states of mind, and behavior to gods is of a piece with behavior to men.

early period of development: "Theft: restitution and fine. Injuring cattle: death or fine, according to the circumstances. Causing cattle to abort: heavy fine. Arson: fine. False witness: heavy fine. Maiming: fine. Adultery: fine, sometimes death. Rape: fine, sometimes death. Using love philters: death or fine, according to circumstances. Poisoning, and practices with an evil intent (termed 'witchcraft'): death and confiscation. Murder: death or fine, according to circumstances. . . . Treason, as contriving the death of a chief, conveying information to the enemy: death and confiscation. Desertion from the tribe: death and confiscation."<sup>1</sup> Similarly among the Kukis: "Injuring the property of others, or taking it without payment; using violence; abusing parents; fraudulently injuring another; giving false evidence; speaking disrespectfully to the aged; marrying an elder brother's wife; putting your foot on, or walking over, a man's body; speaking profanely of religion—are acts of impiety."<sup>2</sup>

As the vigorous and aggressive activities of the male have a very conspicuous value for the group when exercised for the benefit of the group, they become particularly harmful when directed against the safety or interests of the group or the members of the group, and we find that civil and criminal law, and contract, and also conventional morality, are closely connected with the motility of the male. The establishment of moral standards is mediated through the sense of strain—strain to the personal self, and strain to the social self. Whether a man is injured by an assault upon his life or upon his property, he suffers violence, and the first resort of the injured individual or group is to similar violence; but this results in a vicious tit-for-tat reaction whereby the stimulus to violence is reinstated by every fresh act of violence. Within the group this vicious action and reaction is broken up by the intervention of public opinion, either in an informal expression of disapproval, or through the headmen. The man who continues to

<sup>1</sup> J. SHOOTER, *The Kafirs of Natal and the Zulu Country*, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> MAJOR J. BUTLER, *Travels and Adventures in Assam*, p. 88; quoted in SPENCER, *Descriptive Sociology*, Vol. V, p. 33.



kill may be killed in turn, but by order of the council of the tribe, and one of his kinsmen may be appointed to execute him, as under that condition no feud can follow. But there is always a reluctance to banish or take the life of the member of the group, both because no definite machinery is developed for accomplishing either, and because the loss of an able-bodied member of a group is a loss to the group itself. The group does not seek, therefore, immediately to be rid of an offensive member, but to modify his habits, to convert him. Jones says of the Ojibways that there were occasionally bad ones among them, "but the good council of the wise sachems and the mark of disgrace . put upon unruly persons had a very desirable influence."<sup>1</sup> The extreme form of punishment in the power of the folk-moot of the Tuschinen is to be excluded from the public feasts, and to be made a spectator while stoned in effigy and cursed.<sup>2</sup> Sending a man to Coventry is in vogue among the Fejir Bedouins: one who kills a friend is so despised that he is never spoken to again, nor allowed to sit in the tent of any member of the tribe.<sup>3</sup> The formulation of sentiment about an act depends also on the repetition of the act. The act is more irritating, and the irritation more widespread, with each repetition, and there is an increase of the penalty for a second offense, and death for a slight offense when frequently repeated: in the Netherlands stealing of linen left in the fields to be bleached led to the death penalty for stealing a pocket handkerchief. And with increasing definiteness of authority there follows increasing definiteness of punishment, and when finally the habit becomes fixed, conformity with it becomes a paramount consideration, and a deed is no longer viewed with reference to its intrinsic import so much as to its conformity or nonconformity with a standard in the law: *summum jus, summa injuria*.

Morality, involving the modification of the conduct of the individual in view of the presence of others, is already highly

<sup>1</sup> JONES, *History of the Ojibway Indians*, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> VON SEIDLITZ, "Ethnog. Rundschau," *Intern. Archiv f. Ethnographie*, 1890, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> DOUGHTY, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, p. 360.

developed in the tribal stage, since the exigencies of life have demanded the most rigorous regulation of behavior in order to secure the organization and the prowess essential to success against all comers. But the tribe is a unit in hostile coexistence with other similar units, and its morality stops within itself, and applies in no sense to strangers and outsiders. The North American Indians were theoretically at war with all with whom they had not concluded a treaty of peace. In Africa the traveler is safe and at an advantage if by a fiction (the rite of blood-brotherhood) he is made a member of the group; and similarly in Arabia and elsewhere. The old epics and histories are full of the praises of the man who is gentle within the group and furious without it. The earliest commandments doubtless did not originally apply to mankind at large. They meant, Thou shalt not kill within the tribe, Thou shalt not commit adultery within the tribe, etc. Cannibalism furnishes a most interesting example of the prohibition of a practice as applied to the members of the group, while extra-tribal cannibalism continued unabated. And within the tribe there is a continuance of this practice in the forms which do not interfere with the efficiency and cripple the activity of the group. That is, while cannibalism in general is prohibited, the eating of the decrepit, the aged, of invalids, of deformed children, and of malefactors is still practiced.

But there gradually grew up a set of disapprovals of conduct as such, whether within or without the group. In the *Odyssey* Pallas Athene says that Odysseus had come from Ephyra from Ilus, son of Mermerus, "For even thither had Odysseus gone on his swift ship to seek a deadly drug, that he might have wherewithal to smear his bronze-shod arrows: but Ilus would in no wise give it him, for he had in awe the everlasting gods."<sup>1</sup> Here is an extension to society in general of a principle which had been first worked out in the group; for poisoning without the group was long allowed after it was disallowed in the group. The case of poisoning is, indeed, a particularly good instance of an unsatisfaction felt in the substitution of clandestine methods for simple motor force in deciding a dispute, and affords a clear

<sup>1</sup> *Odyssey*, i, 260 (translated by LANG AND MEYER).

example of an important relation between moral feeling and physiological functioning. Animal as well as human society has developed strategy alongside of direct motor expressions, but strategy is only an indirect application of the motor principle. Coördination, associative memory, will, judgment, are involved in strategy; it is only a different mode of functioning. On the other hand, there is a peculiar abhorrence of murder by night, poisoning, drowning in a ship's hold, because, while all the physiological machinery for action is on hand, there is no chance to work it. It is a most exasperating thing to die without making a fight for it. The so-called American duel is an abhorrent thing, because life or death is decided by a turn of the dice, not on the racially developed principle of the battle to the strong. When, then, it is observed within the group that this, that, and the other man has died of poison, each interprets this in terms of himself, and no one feels safe. The use of poison is not only a means of checking activities and doing hurt socially, but this form is most foul and unnatural because it involves a death without the possibility of motor resistance (except the inadequate opportunity on the strategic side of taking precautionary measures against poison), and a victory and social reward without a struggle. The group, therefore early adopts very severe methods in this regard. Death is the usual penalty for the use of poison, and even the possession of poison, among tribes not employing it for poisoning weapons, is punished. Among the Karens of India, if a man is found with poison in his possession he is bound and placed for three days in the hot sun, his poison is destroyed, and he is pledged not to obtain any more. If he is suspected of killing anyone, he is executed.<sup>1</sup> Particularly distressing modes of death, and other means of penalizing death by poison more severely than motor modes of killing, were adopted. The Chinese punish the preparation of poisons or capture of poisonous animals with beheading, confiscation, and banishment of wife and children. In Athens insanity caused by poison was punished with death. The

<sup>1</sup> F. MASON, "On the Dwellings, Works of Art, Laws, etc., of the Karens," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1868, p. 149.

*Sachsenspiegel* provides death by fire. In the lawbook of the tsar Wachtang a double composition price was exacted for death by poison. And in ancient Wales death and confiscation was the penalty for death by poison, and death or banishment the penalty of the manufacturer of poisons. The same quality of disapproval is expressed in early law of sorcery, and it is unnecessary to give details of this also. But, stated in emotional terms, both poison and sorcery, and other underhand practices, arouse one of the most distressing of the emotions—the emotion of dread, if we understand by this term that form of fear which has no tangible or visible embodiment, which is apprehended but not located, and which in consequence cannot be resisted: the distress, in fact, lying in the inability to function. The organism which has developed structure and function through action is unsatisfied by an un-motor mode of decision. We thus detect in the love of fair play, in the golden rule, and in all moral practices a motor element, and with changing conditions there is progressively a tendency, mediated by natural selection and conscious choice, to select those modes of reaction in which the element of chance is as far as possible eliminated. This preference for functional over chance or quasi-chance forms of decision is expressed first within the group, but is slowly extended, along with increasing commercial communication, treaties of peace, and with supernatural assistance, to neighboring groups. The case of Odysseus is an instance of a moment in the life of the race when a disapproval is becoming of general application.

On our assumption that morality is dependent on strains, and that its development is due to the advantage of regulating these strains, we may readily understand why most of the canons of morality are functions of the katabolic male activity. Theft, arson, rape, murder, burglary, highway robbery, treason, and the like, are natural accompaniments of the more aggressive male disposition; the male is *par excellence* both the hero and the criminal. But on the side of the sex we might expect to find the female disposition setting the standards of morality, since reproduction is even a greater part of her nature than of man's.

But here we find the male standpoint carried over and applied to the reproductive process, and the regulation of sex practices transpiring on the basis of force. In the earliest period of society, under the maternal system, the woman had her own will more with her person; but with the formulation of a system of control, based on male activities, the person of woman was made a point in the application of the male standpoint. "The wife, like any other of the husband's goods and chattels, might be sold or lent."<sup>1</sup> "Even when divorced she was by no means free, as the tribe exercised its jurisdiction in the woman's affairs and the disposal of her person."<sup>2</sup> Forsyth reports of the Gonds that "infidelity in the married state is . . . said to be very rare; and, when it does occur, is one of the few occasions when the stolid aborigine is roused to the extremity of passion, frequently revenging himself on the guilty pair by cutting off his wife's nose and knocking out the brains of her paramour with his ax."<sup>3</sup> The sacrifice of wives in Africa, India, Fiji, Madagascar, and elsewhere, upon the death of husbands, shows how completely the person of the female had been made a part of the male activity. Where this practice obtained, the failure of the widow to acquiesce in the habit was highly immoral. Williams says of the strangling of widows by the Fijians: "It has been said that most of the women thus destroyed are sacrificed at their own instance. There is truth in this statement, but unless other facts are taken into account it produces an untruthful impression. Many are importunate to be killed, because they know that life would henceforth be to them prolonged insult, neglect, and want. . . . If the friends of the woman are not the most clamorous for her death, their indifference is construed into disrespect either for her late husband or his friends."<sup>4</sup> Child marriages are another instance of the success of the male in gaining control of the person of the female and of regulating her conduct from his own standpoint. Girls were married or

<sup>1</sup> BONWICK, *Daily Life of the Tasmanians*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> *Highlands of Central India*, p. 149.

<sup>4</sup> T. WILLIAMS, *Fiji and the Fijians*, p. 201.

betrothed before birth, at birth, at two weeks, three months, or seven years of age, and variously often to an adult, and their husbands were thus able to take extraordinary precautions against the violation of their chastity. On the other hand, it frequently happens, especially where marriage by purchase is not developed, that the conduct of the girl is not looked after until she is married; it becomes immoral only when disapproved by her husband. In the Andaman Islands, "after puberty the females have indiscriminate intercourse . . . until they are chosen or allotted as wives, when they are required to be faithful to their husbands, whom they serve. . . . If any married or single man goes to an unmarried woman, and she declines to have intercourse with him by getting up or going to another part of the circle, he considers himself insulted, and, unless restrained, would kill or wound her."<sup>1</sup> Under these conditions the rightness or wrongness of the sexual conduct of the wife turned upon the attitude of the husband toward the act. Hence a very general practice that the men prostituted their wives for hire, but punished unapproved intercourse. "The chastity of the women does not appear to be held in much estimation. The husband will, for a trifling present, lend his wife to a stranger, and the loan may be protracted by increasing the value of the present. Yet, strange as it may seem, notwithstanding this facility, any connection of this kind not authorized by the husband is considered highly offensive and quite as disgraceful to his character as the same licentiousness in civilized societies."<sup>2</sup>

When woman lost the temporary prestige which she had acquired in the maternal system through her greater tendency to associated life, and particularly when her person came more absolutely into the control of man through the system of marriage by purchase, she also accepted and reflected naïvely the moral standards which were developed for the most part through male activities. Any system of checks and approvals in the group, indeed, which was of advantage to the men would be of advantage to the women also, since these checks and approvals were safe-

<sup>1</sup> OWEN, *Transactions Ethnological Society*, New Series, Vol. II, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> LEWIS AND CLARKE, *loc. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 421.

guards of the group as a whole, and not of the men only. The person and presence of woman in society have stimulated and modified male behavior and male moral standards, and she has been a faithful follower, even a stickler for the prevalent moral standards (the very tenacity of her adhesion is often a sign that she is an imitator); but up to date the nature of her activities, the nature, in short, of the strains she has been put to, has not enabled her to set up independently standards of behavior either like or unlike those developed through the peculiar male activities. There is, indeed, a point of difference in the application of standards of morality to men and to women. Morality as applied to man has a larger element of the contractual, representing the adjustment of his activities to those of society at large, or more particularly to the activities of the male members of society; while the morality which we think of in connection with woman shows less of the contractual and more of the personal, representing her adjustment to men, more particularly the adjustment of her person to men. This represents the case as it has been historically, at least, and as it is at present for the most part, but I do not wish to imply that this difference is altogether inherent in the male and female disposition; it is, in fact, partly a matter of habit and attention. It is now beginning to be true that the energies of women may find expression in forms of activity appropriate to their nature, and this will doubtless, in the long run, favor constructive, as over against destructive, modes of social interaction. The doctrines of the Sermon on the Mount and non-resistance, and the practices of asceticism and chivalry, in so far as they represent the sympathetic and passive side of the association, show something of the female quality; but we may be sure that a society which has developed a system of approvals and checks based on the fact of strains will not be adequately regulated by any system of approvals and checks based on a non-strain theory, unless human nature is modified more deeply than anthropology gives us grounds to believe possible.

W. I. THOMAS.